

THE PRUSSIAN OFFICER—AUTOCRAT AND SLAVE

This is the second of two articles on the German system of training officers, written by a young Prussian now in this country. He is the son of a former major in the German army, and was for some years a cadet at the Prussian military academy at Potsdam.

Germany Gives Him Almost Unlimited Authority and Then Compels Him to Exercise It—He Eats, Drinks, Dresses, Marries, Dies, According to Rule.

By A PRUSSIAN

IF I CAN make the Prussian officer clear I can make modern Germany clear. For he is the embodiment of all the governmental theories and practices of his native land. The Prussian officer is Germany.

There is nothing in this country that corresponds to him. The government of the United States is a civilian government and an American army officer is merely an official of one department of the government, with no authority in peace times outside of that department. The Prussian army officer, on the contrary, is the direct agent of a national government that is fundamentally military. He is *ex officio* policeman, detective and deputy sheriff. He cannot be arrested. He may stop traffic, railway trains or other public conveyances and is responsible for the consequences only to the military authorities.

He is an autocrat, but he is equally a slave. Coupled with his almost unlimited authority goes an ironclad obligation to exercise it under given conditions. His actions, public and private; the clothes he wears, the wine he drinks, his private expenditures, his betrothal and marriage, his friendships and his enmities—all these are regulated by code, a code whose violation means disgrace and heavy punishment.

In The Tribune Magazine of two weeks ago I described the system of training at a Prussian military academy, where the future officer spends his years between the ages of ten and eighteen. When he emerges, a sub-lieutenant, he has certain principles deeply ingrained. He has learned to obey orders unquestioningly and unemotionally; he has been schooled to face any danger without show of fear; he has been taught to look upon the private soldier as a pawn, not a man, and upon a civilian as something less than that. He has learned the Prussian lesson and is ready to be a Prussian officer.

One year before his graduation from the academy he chose the regiment to which he wished to belong. His parents then made sure, through strictly unofficial channels, that he would be acceptable to the other officers. Had there been any objection to him he would have had to choose another regiment. This custom is very strict. Not even the Kaiser himself can burden a regiment with an unwelcome officer.

Once the young officer enters his regiment he is completely under the domination of the code. To begin with, he must have an allowance from home, the mini-

mum permissible being 120 marks (about \$30) a month. In addition he receives a monthly salary of 120 marks, but he never sees this—it is all swallowed up by his mess bills and the support of his orderly.

The orderly stands in the same relation to his officer as did the medieval esquire to his knight. He cares for his master's uniforms and other equipment, and in a cavalry regiment takes care of his horse—in other words, a sort of combination valet and groom. He volunteers for this service, and is exempt from other military duties as long as the officer needs him. In battle he must

men, and the government sees to it that the more fortunate ones do not enjoy any undue advantages.

An officer's horse, for example, must not have cost more than a certain sum, and, regardless of price, must never be better or faster than the colonel's. An officer may own one automobile if he can afford it, but only one, and it must not be too obviously an expensive car. He must use it unostentatiously, and is bound by custom to offer the use of it to all the other officers of his regiment in turn. They, by the way, are equally bound to decline.

An officer's marriage is a weighty

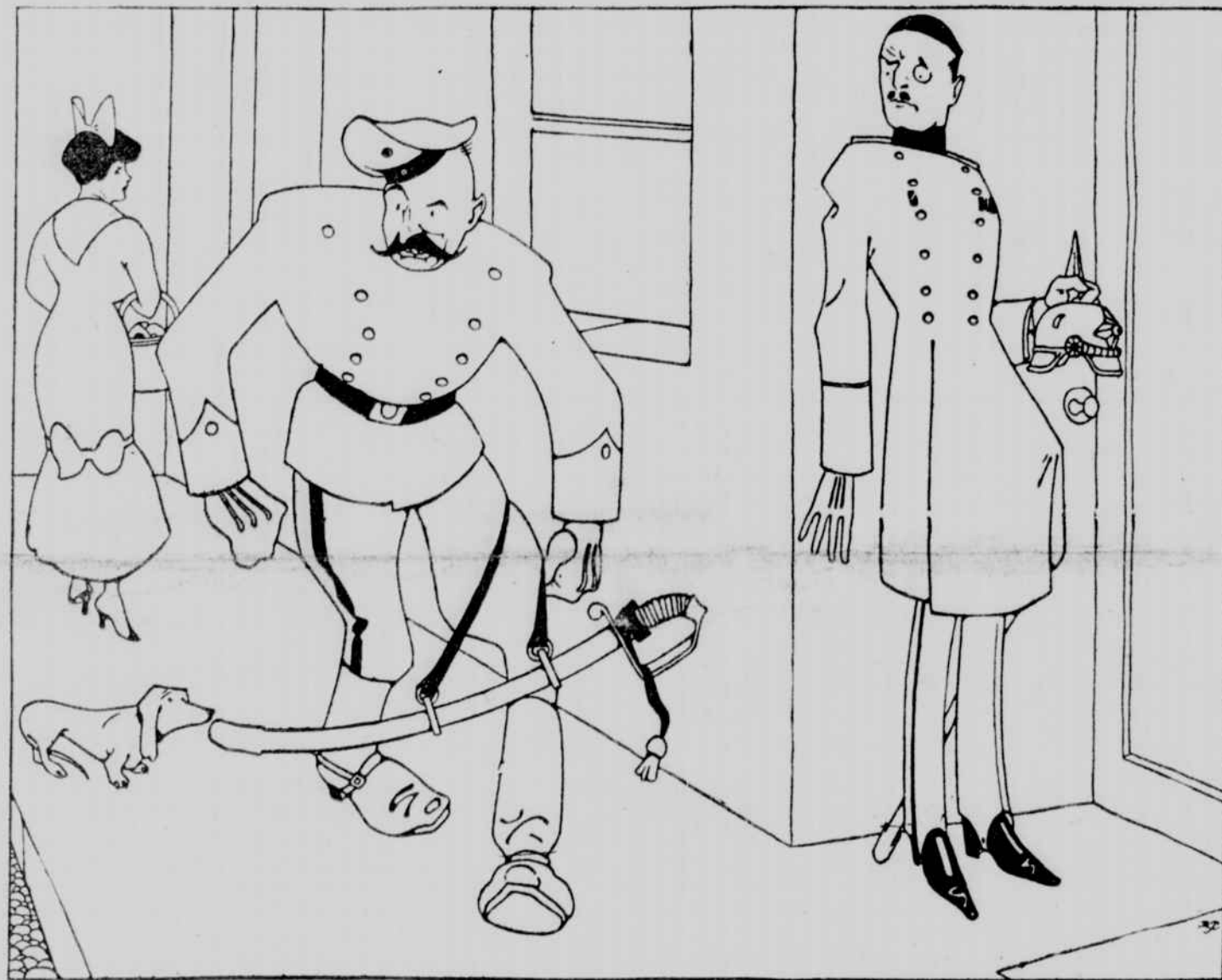
had failed to run him through he could not have remained in the army twenty-four hours. Such is the code.

The officers are not all brutes in spite of their training. Many of them will do their utmost to avoid trouble. I have seen an officer dodge into a doorway to avoid being seen by a drunken private who was staggering up the street. He was afraid the soldier might, if he caught sight of him, become insulting or abusive, in which case he would have had to shoot him on the spot or face dismissal from the army.

Not all officers would be so humane, however. Some of them are extremely

swords. In more serious cases the principals use pistols at thirty, twenty or ten paces, or the deadly cavalry sabre.

Some classes of civilians are *satisfaktionsfähig*—that is, eligible to fight duels.



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keep close by his master, and is responsible for his life.

One of the first discoveries a young officer makes is that his scale of living is subject to strict regulation. Any display of wealth is frowned upon severely. Prussian officers are as a class poor

matter. First, he must obtain his colonel's permission. That granted, the parents of his prospective bride must guarantee a generous dowry. As a married officer he will have a certain social position to maintain, and it is up to the "in-laws" to provide the means. The usual dowry is 70,000 marks (\$17,000) cash and furniture sufficient for a six-room apartment.

TO THE GERMAN CIVILIAN AN OFFICER IS A DIVINITY.

Obviously, it would seem to be an honor to marry a Prussian officer. It is. Indeed, it is hard to exaggerate the well-nigh superstitious awe and reverence with which the rank and file of German soldiers and civilians look up to the officers. For forty years the Prussian government has been fostering this attitude, until it has become second nature to the people. Not that the officer as a man is important. It is the uniform, the sacred "King's coat," that counts.

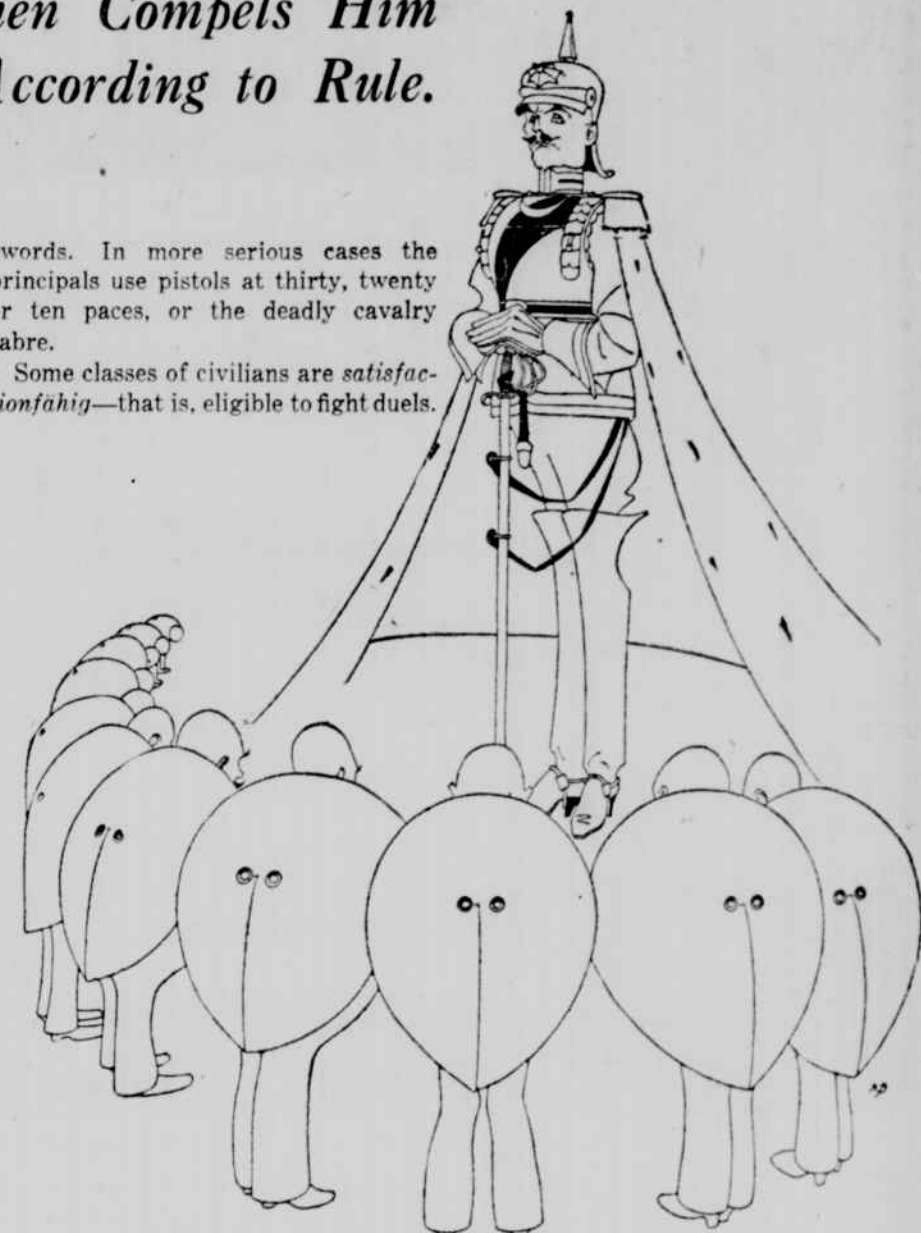
For example, it is an insult—nay, a crime, punishable by death—for a civilian or a private to molest an officer in any way. The officer must avenge the insult instantly or risk dismissal. A few years ago a lieutenant stationed at a garrison near Berlin was roughly handled by a drunken civilian, who came up behind him and pulled one of his epaulets off. The officer promptly ran after him, and after a chase of several hundred yards caught up to him and ran him through with his sabre. The man died the next day. That seems like sheer, wanton brutality, doesn't it? It would not if you had been brought up in Germany. For if that officer had failed to catch the offender, or if he

brutal in their treatment of the private soldiers, who are absolutely at their mercy. Instant and implicit obedience to orders is exacted from their men. If an officer ordered a private to jump over the edge of a cliff the private would have to obey. If he refused one of two things would happen to him. Either he would be shot by the officer or he would be court martialled and sentenced to prison for a term of years. The rule is: "Obey first and make complaint afterward." The fact that in some cases it would be too late to make complaint does not alter the inflexibility of the rule. Such is Prussian logic.

In one instance, though, the soldier gets his due. When a company on the march stops at a wayside spring the officers may not drink until the privates have slaked their thirst. A thirsty officer can still give orders, but a thirsty private cannot march.

DUELLING AMONG OFFICERS IS NOT ONLY LEGAL BUT IS ENCOURAGED.

If an officer is insulted by a brother officer he cannot mete out the summary punishment that he would to a civilian, but he can challenge him to a duel. Duelling is very common in Germany, and is, in fact, encouraged by the Kaiser, on the theory that it keeps the young officers high spirited. These military duels are not to be confused with the *Mensur*, or sporting duels, indulged in at the universities. They are serious affairs, ending only when one of the participants is dead or disabled. The choice of weapons is determined by the seriousness of the offence. Thus, an ordinary quarrel is settled with light



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These include students and the higher grades of professional men. Most of the duels, in fact, take place between students and officers and not among the officers themselves.

Oddly enough, to refuse to fight a man who has challenged you disgraces not yourself, but the challenger. The implication is that he has done something that makes him an unworthy opponent. I left the army at the age of fifteen, but having once been a cadet I "belong"; I am *satisfaktionsfähig*. If I were in Berlin to-day I could ruin the career of any officer in the German army by slapping his face and then refusing to fight him. He would be driven out of the service in twenty-four hours. That is being "too proud to fight" with a vengeance!

MONEY OR NO MONEY, AN OFFICER MUST PAY HIS DEBTS OR KILL HIMSELF.

As I have said, officers are forbidden to make any undue display of wealth, but, on the other hand, they are required to make certain expenditures that sorely tax their slender incomes. They are forced to indulge in certain luxuries, such as expensive wines and champagne, at mess dinners, regardless of their tastes and financial resources. They must ride first class on all railways. They must pay their debts, especially gambling debts, promptly. No one asks where or how the money is procured, but it must be forthcoming.

A Prussian officer must pay a gambling debt within twenty-four hours or he must commit suicide. That is the rule, and there is no appeal from it. Custom even prescribes the form of suicide. He may be thrown from his horse while hunting or he may "accidentally" shoot himself while cleaning a gun. The latter is the commoner method.

At all costs, the officer must keep up his outward appearance. His uniforms must be numerous and immaculate, his horse must be spirited and well groomed. If this entails slow starvation it is no affair of the Prussian government. I have seen an officer of the famous Alexander Regiment, of Berlin, the proudest regiment in Germany, come back from dress parade in his magnificent uniform, which costs perhaps 2,000 marks, and, climbing the stairs to his miserable, unheated attic lodging, sit down to a dinner of dry army bread, beer and sausage. Poor fare, but better than none. And none it would have been if his orderly had not paid for it out of his own pocket.

Why all this display, this insane insistence on rank, this officially encouraged brutality toward private and civilian, this rigid code of private and public behavior? Because power and command in Germany go not to the able man, but to the well born man. The young Prussian officer is not necessarily a born leader; indeed he may be, and often is, stupid and inefficient by nature. So Germany makes natural ability unnecessary. She teaches him to be brutal, because that makes it easier to give orders. She compels private and civilian to obey those orders on pain of death. She makes a uniform more sacred than a man, because the man—any man—need but don the uniform to become an object of veneration.

So you have the Prussian officer—arrogant, simple, comic, tragic, and always ruthlessly efficient.

Why does Germany endure him and the machine of which he is a product? Because Germany firmly believes that Prussia and the Prussian officer are her salvation. In forty years the Prussian machine turned Germany from a loose federation of weak and disorganized little states into a great, prosperous and powerful nation.

I find it hard to believe that there will be a German revolution after the war. If Germany wins, the Prussian machine will have justified its existence. If Germany loses, it will prove to her people that the Prussian machine was right—that Europe was conspiring to crush her. For you must remember that the German people honestly believe that they are fighting a defensive war. A foolish belief, you may say. It is foolish. But Germany believes it.

That belief is easily explained. Suppose the government of the United States and all the newspapers of the United States should insist during the next forty years that Japan was planning to attack us. Suppose the government and newspapers of Japan should insist during the same period that we were planning to attack her. Would not the people of those respective countries believe the charges implicitly after a while? Would not war be inevitable? Would not each side believe that it was acting on the defensive, even if it should take the actual first step toward war?

That is what has been going on in Europe, especially in Germany, these forty years. To be sure, Prussia has been fooling Germany, but how is Germany to find it out?

That is why I can only hope for the coming German revolution. I do not expect it.



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